

# Eight Ways to Stop Violence Against Women

Villagers listen to Thierry Kajeneza and a colleague speak about human rights.



[Thierry Kajeneza](#) grew up witnessing the mistreatment of women and girls. To him, this mistreatment was not only a violation of their human rights but also a missed opportunity to include women and girls in Burundi's post-civil war reconstruction.

In 2007, the YALI Network member took action. Kajeneza and his colleague established [ICIRORE C'AMAHORO](#), a Ngozi province-based group that advocates for the rights of women and girls. Below, Kajeneza shares eight ways communities can stop violence against women and achieve gender equality:

- Create laws and enforce existing laws that protect women from discrimination and violence, including rape, beatings, verbal abuse, mutilation, torture, "honor" killings and trafficking.
- Educate community members on their responsibilities under international and national human rights laws.
- Promote the peaceful resolution of disputes by including the perspectives of women and girls.
- Strengthen women's ability to earn money and support their households by providing skills training for women.
- Sensitize the public to the disadvantages of early and forced child marriages.
- Highlight the value of girls' education and of women's participation in economic development.
- Encourage women to participate in the political process and educate the public about the value of women's votes.
- Raise public awareness of the poor conditions some women face, particularly in rural areas.

Learn more about YALI Network members [Kajeneza](#) and [Thierry](#) work with the Man Up campaign on our blog.

Learn about more ways to get involved at [yali.state.gov/16days](http://yali.state.gov/16days) and [pledge](#) today to help end Gender-Based Violence in your community.

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## Man Up to Stop Violence Against Women: Uganda

*"Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse and cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography."*

James Byarugaba



While a student at Makerere University in Kampala, James Byarugaba began to learn about gender and human rights. He discovered that “the cost of gender inequality is huge” and made a commitment to raise awareness about the value of equality.

In 2010, Byarugaba learned about the [Man Up](#) campaign, a collaboration of the Clinton Global Initiative and Vital Voices Global Partnership. At the group’s youth summit in Johannesburg that year, he met other youth who shared his commitment to equality and to ending violence against women and girls. “I realized I was not fighting alone,” says the 33-year-old, who also serves as a lecturer in project planning and management at Makerere.

Byarugaba has put his commitment to work through the nonprofit group Youth Alive Uganda. He says Youth Alive has been successful at ending violence against women in communities they work in because it:

- Incorporates gender into all its programs, which include skills development and health care.
- Started peer support groups for young people. About 100 groups with 50 members each meet with parents’ associations, teachers, religious leaders and men’s and women’s groups around the country to talk about the benefits of gender equality. “Working with community men’s groups has helped reduce sexual and physical violence against women,” Byarugaba says.
- Promotes gender equality and an end to gender-based violence to school officials. That has resulted in some schools adopting child protection policies, providing separate toilets for girls and boys, and, in some instances, changing rooms and sanitary pads for girls.
- Provides teen-oriented prenatal sessions where young mothers can share their experiences and challenges.
- Partners with local institutions and governmental bodies to mobilize logistical and financial support for gender equality efforts.

Members of the Man Up campaign in Uganda get the message out.



“My vision is one world ... where boys and girls and men and women have the same opportunities and are empowered to contribute equally in shaping the world they want,” Byarugaba says. “My vision is of a violence-free world where no human being owns the other or inflicts harm based on one’s gender.”

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# Man Up to Stop Violence Against Women: Burundi

*“Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse and cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography.”*

— Man Up Campaign

Thierry Kajeneza grew up witnessing women and girls being raped, forced into prostitution and sent out alone to collect water and firewood and to look for food.

Thierry Kajeneza, front center, and a  colleague tell rural women in Burundi about their rights.

“I saw how women were not invited like men to speak out about their problems and about what they could contribute to the construction of Burundi” after a long civil war, Kajeneza, a 35-year-old human rights activist and YALI Network member, recalls.

That impression pushed Kajeneza and a colleague to establish [ICIRORE C’AMAHORO](#) in 2007. The Ngozi province-based group advocates for human rights, especially for women and girls. It wants to help young people avoid the mistakes of previous generations and learn to become leaders.

ICIRORE C’AMAHORO, which means “mirror of peace” in Kirundi, reaches out to young women and men to help spread its messages to the wider public. It runs youth clubs in schools throughout the country and started a youth camp. It organizes gatherings that give young men and women opportunities to talk about gender issues. And it encourages women to form support networks and learn financial skills.

The organization’s strategy includes finding opportunities in the community where husbands and wives can work together to make decisions, then discuss why each decision was made. That encourages “a safe environment for women to express themselves and allows both husbands and wives to recognize the power of working together ... in the workplace, at home and in the community,” Kajeneza says.

Kajeneza notes that Burundi’s national and local governments have “responded positively” to ICIRORE’s work. Local authorities help inspire residents to attend ICIRORE’s meetings and training sessions. The national government gave ICIRORE the land on which it is constructing offices.

The international community also has responded. In 2010, the civil rights advocate was invited to the Man Up Young Leaders Summit in Johannesburg. A collaboration of the Clinton Global Initiative and Vital Voices Global Partnership, the [Man Up](#) campaign motivates youth to help stop violence against women and girls and advance gender equality.

Kajeneza follows the YALI Network on Facebook and says he likes “knowing other young people who

are involved in many domains of leadership.” He advises members to use social media to share information about what they are doing to end violence against women.

“This issue of gender violence will be solved if we all stand together. ... The world will become a village where men and women will live in harmony,” Kajeneza says.

Take your pledge today for how you will help end violence against women and girls in your communities at [yali.state.gov/4her](http://yali.state.gov/4her).

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## Create Opportunities, Take Others Along

**By Edda Zekarias, Addis Ababa**

At the 24th African Union Summit in Addis Ababa in January, the AU heralded 2015 as the Year of Women’s Empowerment and Development toward Africa’s Agenda 2063.

### **We speak the same language**

Speaking to 500 young Africans attending the inaugural summit of the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders last summer, U.S. first lady Michelle Obama passionately asked for youth’s best efforts to change the disheartening plight of many girls and women in Africa who often, and not by choice, miss out on opportunities.

More than 5,000 women participated in   
Ethiopia’s 2015 Women First run to  
mark International Women’s Day on March 8.

“This is where Africa’s future lies — with those women-run businesses, with those girls attending university, and with leaders like you who are making their dreams possible. And the question today is how all of you and young people like you will steer Africa’s course to embrace that future,” Obama said.

Not long before that, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, chair of the African Union Commission, had a similar message. “We need much greater commitment and action to empower women and girls in the process of eradicating hunger, poverty and promoting development. Furthermore, there is need to give special attention to increasing the participation of women in decision-making in all areas of life, as a means of improving the quality of decision-making ... including in the protection of the environment and wildlife.”

March 8, International Women’s Day, is celebrated the world over. Sadly, for many girls and women, opportunities are far from within reach. Their battles in every aspect of life — at work, school or

home — are silent and painful. Imagine that every single mistake or bad thing that happens in a family becomes blame thrown at a female family member. Will younger female members of that family be treated with respect and dignity as they mature into adulthood? How will their self-esteem be high enough so they can be confident and competitive?

“At the current pace, it will take 81 years to achieve gender parity in economic participation, and some 50 years to reach parity in parliamentary representation,” [U.N. Women](#) reports.

## Hope


Yet, there is hope. We have each other. We also have strong support from the men who understand us.

“A truly strong, powerful man isn’t threatened by a strong, powerful woman,” the first lady said.

In an opinion piece published on International Women’s Day, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said, “While their work may not always make the front pages, women are confronting our most pressing global issues. At great personal risk, they are fighting poverty, discrimination and violence so that their families, communities and countries can have better lives.”

“I see the power of women every day in every country that I visit,” he said.

This year, sustainable development goals (SDGs) will build upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs were about quantity. SDGs will enhance quality. [MDG3](#) set out to “promote gender equality and empower women.” [SDG5](#) will push efforts to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

Runners reach the finish line at   
Ethiopia’s 2015 Women First run on  
International Women’s Day March 8.

Including women in decision-making can double if not triple a nation’s economic and human development. This is true here in Africa.

At the International Conference on the Emergence of Africa held in Abidjan in March, UNDP chief [Helen Clark](#) proposed a way forward for Africa. “By reducing inequalities, African countries will lift human development and will harness the full potential of women and currently marginalized groups to contribute to development,” she said.

Much remains to be done. Whatever comes of these efforts, women who are able will play a key role in bringing other young girls and women along. So what will our revised route for the better be?


“If you keep positive and optimistic about what can be done, [things] do work out,” said former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

For my part I pledged on [#Africa4Her](#) to work in partnership with my alma mater, Addis Ababa University, to help young women students build confidence and set goals for while they are at school and later in the workplace. I will help them gain access to a network of pioneering professional women with whom they can talk about the challenges they face. This will help them begin to develop

internship opportunities and long-term mentor relationships.

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## Everyone Has a Role to Play

For three days, from March 24th through 26th, Alvin Allgood engaged with the YALI Network  in a #YALICHAT on the issues, obstacles that have kept women and girls from educational opportunities, and the ability to develop professionally. The Vital Voices chief operating officer brought his expansive and informed view of the issue to the YALI Network as part of the March focus on investing in women and girls. In responding to questions and comments from the YALI Network, he also discussed ideas and solutions for creating real change that will allow women and girls to “achieve their full potential.”

Read his blog on empowering women and girls [here](#).

Several questions from Network members acknowledged the entrenched prejudices and stereotypes that have prevented women and girls from playing a role in society. Questions and comments noted the resistance to educational opportunity and gender bias, particularly among men. In response to one post, Allgood stated that, “Changing culture takes time, and educating all youth is key to long term progress. It would also be useful to look at examples from other neighboring communities as learning lessons for how they have dealt with gender stereotypes.”

But many Network members admitted that men are important to changing this attitude and that it is not up to women alone. Allgood remarked that, “As a father it is my duty to ensure that my son and daughter grow up respecting all of human kind. I am happy to see the younger generations being more and more color and gender blind. Women can inspire men and they often times do. Men should not be threatened by womens rights but accepting and bold to stand alongside them.”

As one Network member put it, “It is the duty of everyone, including men in sound positions to create a platform and investment for the education and empowerment of women. We owe it our women and humanity at large.”

Creating opportunities for women entrepreneurship was another area of interest for Network members. Many identified this as critical to your community’s and country’s economic health. Allgood agreed. “Through our work at Vital Voices, we have found that despite the proven benefits of women’s economic engagement, women business owners still face disproportionate barriers. As the future leaders of the continent, I encourage you to advocate for women’s economic empowerment in your communities. It is not only right, it is also smart economics.”

In signing off from his #YALICHAT, Allgood had praise and a further challenge for the YALI Network.

*“Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this [#YALICHAT](#). Your comments and*


*questions have inspired me, and I hope that my responses have done the same. Collaborating and networking are critical to affecting real change. Collectively we can make a difference. We have been reminded this week that words alone are not enough and that we have to be willing to take bold steps. As you make this pledge to invest in women and girls, be sure to invite your fellow network members and think about what you can achieve together.”*

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## **#Africa4Her: Ten Exemplary Pledges to Invest in Women and Girls**

This March, YALI Network members have made the commitment to invest in women and girls in Africa, not only to help achieve gender equality, but also to promote economic growth, good governance, and future innovation. Women and girls are often the foundation of a community, and it is essential that they are given the same opportunities as men for that nation to grow. More than 700 YALI Network members pledged to invest in women and girls, and many of these pledges have already been put into action. Below is just a sample of the amazing and creative pledges that were made this month.

### **1. Leadership development training for 25 Cameroonian women; create Young Women’s Advocacy Network:**

Patience Agwenjang from Cameroon pledges to organize a six-month leadership development training course for 25 women and to create the Young Women’s Advocacy Network to support effective policy on gender issues and good governance. 

### **2. Mentor young female victims of human trafficking in Nigeria:**

Lawrenta Igoh from Nigeria pledges to mentor girls who have been victims of human trafficking by organizing training sessions on reproductive health and life-building skills to help prepare them to adjust to society and decrease their vulnerability to being re-trafficked. 


### **3. Feature business women in an entrepreneurship magazine:**

Mothibedi Sereme from South Africa pledges to help young women through a local entrepreneurship magazine that he publishes by featuring articles and bios on successful female entrepreneurs. He will also host a seminar on leadership and higher education for young women at which inspiring businesswomen will speak to girls about their role in the economy and the importance of education.


### **4. Empower young women through poetry:**

Mercedes Leburu pledges to help empower other young women in South Africa to become confident and lead a liberated lifestyle through writing poetry that will boost their self-esteem.

## **5. Educate young girls about protected sex and how to grow produce successfully:**

Noel Lutomia in Kenya pledges to help young women start small income-generating projects, such as small crop farming, that would earn them independence from men and decrease their vulnerability to sexual predators. 

## **6. Help girls continue their education by providing sanitary napkins:**

James Obare Ondongo from Kenya pledges to help increase the chances for girls' education in two primary schools by distributing sanitary napkins so girls can attend school regularly during their monthly cycles. 

## **7. Organize art workshops to help women network and empower them through their own creativity:**

Kunle Adewale from Nigeria pledges to invest in women by holding workshops with a focus on therapeutic art and vocational skills. The art produced at these workshops will be publicly displayed and put up for auction, with the profits going directly back to the women and girls who participate.

## **8. Hold a conference for young women in business to expand their horizons and share ideas:**

Nathacia Oliver from South Africa pledges to initiate the first "Young Women Thrive" business conference, where young female entrepreneurs can gather to network and collaborate on new and exciting business ideas.

## **9. Tutor female classmates in a course:**

Samuel Ndhlovu from Zambia pledges to assist two of his classmates in a course that he is doing well in by tutoring them three days a week.

## **10. Organize a training workshop for women in small-scale dairy production:**

Khalid Ngassa from Tanzania pledges to organize and host a four-day training workshop for women who run small-scale dairy production operations as a part of the Nronga Women's Dairy Cooperative Society. He will teach them about business efficiency and how to maximize their profits using their available resources.


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# **What Role Will You Play?**

By: Alvin Allgood



I am proud to have this opportunity to engage with you all and look forward to our #YALICHAT on investing in women and girls.

Alvin Allgood is the chief operating  officer of Vital Voices. He has more than 25 years of leadership and management experience.

Everyone has a role to play when it comes to investing in women and girls. I believe that your generation has already made a mark. You're known for your curiosity, creativity and refusal to accept systems that no longer work. You see problems and you fearlessly work to create solutions. You use technology to relate in ways we couldn't have imagined even 10 years ago. You aren't bound by convention, and you're not satisfied with just accumulating wealth or power. Maybe more than any generation that's come before you, you're motivated to contribute to the larger social good — to do well while doing good.

It's this motivation that convinces the rest of us that you will improve on the world you're inheriting, and solve some of the biggest problems we face.

This month the world turns its attention to one of the greatest challenges of our time: the universal inequality that keeps women and girls from achieving their full potential. Each March on International Women's Day, global organizations, national officials and local leaders recommit to investing in solutions that work. At Vital Voices, this is what we do each and every day.

For more than 18 years, Vital Voices has been investing in women leaders who improve the world. We find women who have a vision for a better world and demonstrate leadership that unites and inspires others. Then we partner with them to help make that vision a reality.


We work with leaders in three key areas: human rights, economic opportunity, and political and public leadership. These women are in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East.

We make long-term investments in each leader and design programs that offer practical skills and services. We connect them with expert advisers for mentoring and collaboration, and support them in telling their stories and sharing their perspectives.

Together, these interventions increase a leader's capacity and expand her access to opportunity. They enable a leader to accelerate the impact she is having on the ground, realize her vision, and improve not just her community, but the world beyond.

As a member of the YALI Network, you're linked to more than 130,000 of your peers. You're part of a community with the potential to educate, motivate and have a lasting impact — both online and off.

I know firsthand the power of a network like yours. Throughout my career, I've seen what a determined group of leaders can achieve when they work together toward a shared goal. Before joining Vital Voices, I spent more than 20 years in the education sector innovating, improving and expanding educational services to prevent dropouts and create solutions around problems that have put our youth at risk. This was only possible through collaboration.

Through his work with Vital Voices,  Allgood is helping to create a global network of women leaders.

What we see every day at Vital Voices is that real leadership leads to collective empowerment. Every woman leader we invest in makes it her mission to reinvest in the rising generation. By sharing access, information and opportunity, the women we partner with are empowering other women and girls. It's this collaboration and cycle of impact that improves communities around the world.

When you consider making a pledge to invest in women and girls, look first to your fellow network members and think about what you can achieve together.

As you work to strengthen and expand your various entrepreneurial ventures, I urge you to leverage the networks and technology you have available to make ambitious pledges to empower the women and girls in your communities.

I look forward to reading your comments and answering any questions you have during the #YALICHAT.

*Alvin Allgood is the chief operating officer of Vital Voices. He has more than 25 years of leadership and management experience, particularly in the education sector. Mr. Allgood is a veteran of the U.S. Army and has earned a bachelor's degree in advertising and public relations as well as a master's degree in organizational management.*

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## Mentors Help Guide Entrepreneur's Businesses

Cynthia



Nigerian entrepreneur Cynthia proved that there is financial and environmental value in cassava peels.

A finalist in the 2014 Global Innovation through Science and Technology competition and a YALI Network member, Cynthia developed a way to convert cassava peels into nutritious goat feed. Farmers had perceived the peels as a useless byproduct and burned them as a cheap way of disposal. But that practice releases harmful pollutants into the atmosphere.

Nigeria is the world's largest producer of cassava, each year growing 40 metric tons and generating 12 million metric tons of peels. When burned, those peels release more than 10 million tons of toxic carbon monoxide in the air.

Cynthia's solution to the problem begins with a simple platform on which peels are dried. The dried


peels are packaged and sold as a healthy goat feed. By selling both food products derived from the cassava tuber and animal feed, farmers can utilize 100 percent of their plants and boost their incomes. “This is something the community embraces with joy and excitement,” Cynthia says.

In 2013, Cynthia, 24, founded the social enterprise Kadosh Production Company in Delta state to recycle cassava waste. The venture also helps small-scale farmers get credit so they can purchase drying platforms, and it links cassava growers and processors with goat-farmer customers. With an eye set on expansion to other countries, Cynthia says she hopes her business will grow to be “a major influence in the Nigerian economy and Africa at large.”

Cynthia has a bachelor’s degree in textile science and polymer technology and a master’s in business administration from Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. She says that since she was young, her parents have inspired her to go into business.

Further inspiration came later when Cynthia volunteered to work for a year at a woman-owned bakery “to learn how to run a business of my own.” At the bakery she learned about the challenges associated with running a business and how to handle those challenges. The experience “made me confident that I could run my own business,” she says.

Cynthia received further business advice from a U.S. mentor — a former United Parcel Service executive. Gary Mastro is one of many experienced businesspeople [MicroMentor](#) has matched with young entrepreneurs around the world. MicroMentor is an initiative of the nonprofit humanitarian group Mercy Corps based in Oregon. More than half of the entrepreneurs who request its help are from outside the United States, the group notes.

Cynthia, center, stands with some of the  entrepreneurs she has mentored and their supporters.

Cynthia’s first venture was a liquid soap company called EverGlow that makes an affordable, hygienic alternative to bar soap. “Gary is a pillar in my business and a man I respect so much,” she says.

And now Cynthia is a mentor herself. In 2013 she founded Confident Women to mentor young women and teach them about home management, family relationships and how to make liquid soap so they could start their own small-scale businesses. The businesswoman later changed the name of Confident Women to the CAMY Foundation after collaborating with a partner in Zimbabwe who wanted a similar mentoring model in her country. CAMY Foundation now has more than 450 women members in Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

Cynthia says she communicates regularly with other YALI Network members who tell her about what is happening in other countries and let her “see the great work young leaders like me are doing.”

“This encourages me a lot to keep up the work and never give up so we can have a better future.” She adds that she learns a lot from the ongoing [YALIChat](#) Twitter conversation.

Cynthia encourages other YALI Network members and potential members to “maximize the

opportunities from YALI Network” and to “be a change in their society.”

Learn more about the [GIST Tech-I business pitch competition](#).

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## [#YALICHAT with the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues, Cathy Russell](#)

*Cathy Russell serves as the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues. Previously she served at the White House, coordinating the development of the Obama Administration’s strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence globally. Join Ambassador Russell ([@AmbCathyRussell](#)) for a Twitter #YALICHAT on Wednesday, March 18th at 13:00 UTC. Additional details below.*



ssell visits girls at a school in Zambia

As young African leaders and followers of the YALI Network, you already know that the United States invests in women and girls because it’s the right thing to do for gender equality and the smart thing to do for our foreign policy.

When policies and programs consider women and girls, they’re more successful. They promote stronger democracies and more durable peace agreements. They increase food security and make for healthier families. They improve public service delivery. And they lead to fewer conflicts and more rapidly growing economies.

As the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues, it’s my job to work with my colleagues

across the U.S. government and with leaders around the world to advance the status of women and girls worldwide. Every day I talk with government officials, world leaders, and women and girls around the world about how women have contributed to global progress and why we need to break the barriers keeping women and girls from fully participating in society.

Earlier this month, I had the privilege of presenting ten women from ten countries with the Secretary of State's [International Women of Courage Award](#). These women, including Marie Claire Tchecola from Guinea and Beatrice Epaye from the Central African Republic, have shown exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for women's rights and empowerment.

As an emergency room nurse in Guinea, Marie Claire Tchecola has been on the front lines of the fight against Ebola. When she became infected with the Ebola virus, she took precautions to protect other workers and her family from contracting the disease - and when she recovered, she went back to work. Through her leadership in the Ebola Survivors Association of Guinea, Marie Claire continues to spread awareness about the disease and fight the stigma associated with its survivors.

When Seleka rebels stormed the streets of Bangui and overtook the Central African Republic's capital, one of their first stops was the office of Beatrice Epaye, an outspoken activist who raised her voice to condemn the horrors of civil war and to call for peace, human rights, and good governance. Refusing to be intimidated, Beatrice took to the radio and met with local and international organizations, eventually becoming the president of the Preparatory Committee for the National Dialogue.

Ms. Tchecola and Ms. Epaye are proof of how women can and do transform societies with little fanfare through their everyday actions. Yet in every country - from Guinea to Germany to Guatemala - women and girls face challenges and barriers that keep them from fully participating. A family may choose to send a son, but not a daughter, to school because there's only enough money for one child's fees. A woman may be kept from launching a new business because she can't access capital. Or bias and stereotypes about women's roles in society will keep a woman from her rightful seat at the peacekeeping table or in Parliament.

It will take all of us - men and women, boys and girls - to achieve the progress we need to unleash the power of women and girls. But if every one of us takes action, we can break down these barriers and open doors for women and girls of courage.

I urge you all, both my fellow women and our male allies, to [take the #Africa4Her pledge](#) and tell us how you will invest in women and girls. Show us how you will raise, educate, protect, support, mentor, and elevate the many women and girls of courage in your life.

*Join the YALICHAT on Wednesday, March 18th at:*

*12:00-13:00 Cape Verde Time (CVT)*

*13:00-14:00 UTC/GMT*

*14:00-15:00 West Africa Time (WAT)*

*15:00-16:00 Central Africa (CAT) and South Africa Standard Time (SAST)*

*18:00-19:00 Eastern Africa Time (EAT)*

*19:00-20:00 Seychelles and Mauritius (SCT/MUT)*

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# Eco-Pads Keep Girls in School

Lucy Athieno



Taking advantage of a morning break between classes in Buteba, Uganda, then-13-year-old Lucy Athieno set off to play with friends. Then she heard some boys shouting at her.

She looked down and saw a blotch of red on her otherwise clean uniform. Embarrassed, she quickly sat down. It was the only way to stop the boys from making fun of her. After all the other students had gone, she got up and went home. She did not return to school.


Many girls in low-income communities drop out of school when menstruation begins because they lack information and hygienic material to use.

Days went by before Athieno shared her experience with her late mother's friend. The woman told her to continue using rags and to throw them away after use. She said, "Nobody should see your blood. It is taboo."

A year later, Athieno was adopted by an aunt who bought Athieno her first sanitary pads. The gift of pads made the young woman realize that the "problem" of menstruation was not unique to her. The aunt also persuaded Athieno to return to school.

When she got to secondary school, Athieno — a 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow and YALI Network member — suggested to a teacher that they cut pieces of cloth and give them to other girls. She believed all girls should have the right to good health and education and not be hindered by what is a normal biological process. But the teacher considered the idea peculiar.

Convinced that her idea was realistic and desperately needed, Athieno carried it through to university. In her second year at Makerere University in 2010, she began to volunteer with a women's organization and was convinced her cause was justifiable. "Many girls were using rags or leaves or sitting in the sand during menstruation," she says.

Lucy Athieno makes reusable sanitary 

Eco-Pads to support retention of girls  
in school.

As part of her volunteer work, she went to Kenya where she found an organization that was distributing sanitary pads to girls. Returning to Uganda, she purchased bed sheet material and cut it into pieces and thought, "What if I inserted something between two layers of this material — something that would absorb the blood?"

She experimented with different types of cloth pads until she settled on one that was washable,

comfortable and reliable. “These pads are reusable for at least one year, making them not only affordable but environmentally friendly,” she says, adding that the pads help young women return to and stay in school. One year’s supply of pads cost just \$3, she notes.

Now 30, Athieno has bought four sewing machines to make pads that have helped hundreds of Ugandan girls. In 2013, she founded Aluta Holdings, which holds rights for the reusable “Eco-Pads.” She wants to expand access to the product to other countries.

So far, Aluta has provided pads to more than 400 girls. Meanwhile, Athieno has mentored 200 girls, encouraging them to stay in school.

“I want to impact the whole of Africa,” she says.

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